School Bus Safety

Final Report on 1983 Hearings
May 15, 1984

Hon. James W. Garner
Chairman

Saskatchewan

Forward

"Children are a heritage that we in Saskatchewan consider a most important and treasured resource. They are the future, the hope and the prosperity this province will need in order to succeed."

The single greatest threat to the safety of children who ride school buses are motorists who pass the bus when loading or unloading. Clearly, this has to be one of the highest priorities for action.

The responsibility is ours, to protect our children, our future and our hope. Through consultative meetings throughout this province, we are developing solutions to this problem, so not one more life will be taken through an accident that need not happen.

James W. Garner
Minister, Highways
and Transportation.

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School Bus Safety Review Committee Members:

Chairman:

- Hon. James Garner
  Minister of Highways and Transportation

Vice-Chairman:

- Nick Volk, President
  Saskatchewan School Trustees Association (SSTA)

Secretary:

- Jack Upshall, Director,
  Public Communications
  Highways and Transportation

Members:

- Jake Volk, Executive Director
  Saskatchewan School Trustees Association

- Ewald Wagner, Chairman
  Transportation Council, SSTA

- Jim Phillips
  Executive Member, SSTA

- Carl Shiels, Executive Director
  Traffic Safety Services, Highway Traffic Board
  Highways and Transportation

- Al Popoff, Director
  Traffic Safety Engineering Branch
  Highways and Transportation

- Gordon McGregor, Educational Consultant
  Education

Introduction:

This is the final report of the 1983 Hearings of the Saskatchewan School Bus Safety Review Committee.

The report is the result of seven public hearings held throughout Saskatchewan and reflects the reaction to options and alternatives outlined in the Committee's Interim Report that was released November 15, 1983.

There are several major recommendations in the report dealing with a wide range of school bus safety issues. In addition a number of developments that the Committee is investigating plus a series of recommendations requiring further study, are embodied in this report.

It is the consensus of the Committee that in order to properly assess all alternatives their role shall continue to be on-going, offering a focus for public discussion on the vital issue of pupil transportation safety.

Summary of Activities:

The Committee was established June 20th, 1983 after Saskatchewan recorded its first fatality resulting from a school bus accident on May 26, 1983. At that time it was determined that a review of all aspects of school bus safety was in order.

The Committee held public hearings in seven Saskatchewan cities between August 2nd, 1983 and concluding October 18, 1983. Many scheduled briefs and hundreds of letters were received by the committee as a result of those hearings.

On November 15, 1983 at the Saskatchewan School Trustees Association annual meeting in Saskatoon, the Hon. James Garner released the Committee's Interim Report.

The interim report addressed issues and alternatives raised by bus drivers, parents, school representatives, special interest groups and the police. With few exceptions, no specific alternatives were proposed by the Committee in that Report. Rather, those options outlined were presesented for further discussion.

However, four recommendations were acted upon by the committee because of overwhelming public support.

1. A new "Stop (for School Bus) When Lights Flashing" sign was introduced on October 18, 1983. These signs are located on higher volume roadways to ensure maximum exposure to motorists. Further, expansion of the present "School Bus Ahead" sign program was announced in co-operation with Rural Development.

   Two hundred "Stop When Lights Flashing" signs have been erected to date. As for the "School Bus Ahead" sign, 42 school divisions have identified 162 locations. Eighty-six of these are on rural roads and 76 are on numbered provincial highways.

2. A special school bus driver handbook is being prepared by the Department of Highways and Transportation in consultation with the SSTA, school bus drivers and contractors.

3. A pamphlet has been prepared outlining the procedures which school bus drivers should follow when a motorist passes the bus while loading or unloading. The pamphlet will include a check list of the information needed by the driver should he or she be called to testify in court.

4. The creation of a separate 'S' endorsement card for the school bus drier licences. This will provide more accurate information to school boards as to the licence validation dates. The 'S' endorsement will then be valid for a three year period and will not be dependent upon the driver's birth for renewal.

General Recommendations:

1. Stopping

The Committee feels very strongly that the single greatest threat to the safety of children who ride school buses is motorists who pass the bus when loading or unloading passengers. Clearly, this has to be one of the highest priorities for action.

The interim report outlined actions which have been taken related to the installation of two types of signs on provincial highways and rural roads. It also referred to the preparation of a pamphlet designed to assist school bus drivers to collect relevant evidence when motorists violate the requirement to stop for school buses loading or unloading. This pamphlet has been included in the public communications package discussed elsewhere in this report and will be distributed to all bus drivers in the province.

The following three recommendations should serve to further minimize this problem.

A. Stop Arms

The alternately flashing red light system currently used on school buses in Saskatchewan serves two purposes. While the bus is slowing down to stop, the lights serve as an advance warning of the bus driver's intention to stop. Once the bus has stopped, the lights indicate the requirement to stop and remained stopped.

To further reinforce the 'stop' message, several jurisdictions in North America have added a special stop arm to the side of the bus. This device has the general appearance of a stop sign with the addition of red lights, top and bottom, which flash in unison with the regular safety lights. The stop arm is normally folded flat against the side of the bus. When the bus comes to a full stop, the stop arm swings out to be clearly visible on the left side of the bus. With the stop arm activated, there can be no uncertainty about what is required of passing motorists.

Recommendation

The Committee recommends that these stop arms be mandatory on all new school buses registered for the first time after August 31, 1984.

The Committee further recommends that school boards and school bus contractors give serious consideration to retro-fitting stop arms on all buses with significant remaining operational life.

B. Mandatory School Bus Question on Driver Exams

Every written examination conducted by the Highway Traffic Board for every class of licence includes a question on the law respecting the need to stop for school buses.

Recommendation

The Committee recommends that effective July 1, 1984, no driver should be given a passing mark if the question related to the laws governing the need to stop for school buses is answered incorrectly.

C. Minimum Fine

In light of the increased public information regarding the need to stop for school buses, it is unlikely that any motorist will be unaware of his other legal responsibility. The Committee feels therefore, that drivers who pass school buses when the red lights are flashing should face very stiff penalties.

Recommendation

The Committee recommends that the Vehicles Act be amended to establish a minimum fine of $250 for the offence of passing a stopped school bus displaying alternately flashing red lights.

2. Van Conversions:

The Committee has noted that vans converted to school buses are not likely to provide the same level of passenger protection offered by conventional school bus bodies. The Committee also noted that some school bus manufacturers offer small school buses with only slightly greater seating capacity than vans yet afford greater occupant protection, and that many school boards and contractors are opting for the small school buses rather than van conversions.

Recommendation

The Committee strongly recommends that boards of education and contractors seriously consider discontinuing the purchase of any new van conversions in favour of the more crash-worthy, small conventional school bus.

3. School Bus Communications:

The Committee recognizes that two-way communication between the school buses and a base station has several potential safety and operational advantages. However, the extent of the advantage is largely dependant upon the geographic and demographic make-up of the area served.

Recommendation

The Committee recommends that local school authorities review their current school bus communication operation with regard to the adequacy of current base to bus, home to bus and bus to bus systems.

4. First Aid Kit:

The Committee reviewed the contents of a new first aid kit called 'The Car Behind' kit. It is specifically designed for use at the roadside in responding to acute emergencies and is believed to offer several advantages over the conventional first aid kit. One of the main advantages is an enclosed instructional booklet that can be reviewed from time to time by both driver and students who have completed basic first aid training. The booklet is also designed to provide quick and easy reference at the time of an emergency.

Recommendation

The Committee recommends that all school buses registered for the first time after August 31, 1984 be fitted with an appropriate number of "Car Behind" first aid kits.

5. Future Activities:

It is the consensus of the Committee that in order to properly assess all alternatives, their role shall continue to be on-going, offering a focus for public discussion on the vital issue of pupil transportation safety.

Other Activities and Developments:

1. Seat Belts

In the course of the hearings the Committee received predominately negative reaction to the idea of seat belts on school buses.

The Committee has also learned that Transport Canada intend to conduct crash tests of school buses later in 1984. The Committee expects these tests to establish the level of safety provided by the new high backed seats and whether seat belts do in fact increase the protection.

The Committee will therefore defer any recommendation regarding seat belt installation and use until the results of the tests have been fully assessed and any policy changes by Transport Canada has been identified.

2. Bylaws Respecting Flashing Lights

The new Vehicles Act makes the use of flashing safety lights mandatory at all locations except where prohibited by municipal bylaw. Most cities and towns which require bylaws have submitted them to the Highway Traffic Board and these have been approved. An up-to-date list of these bylaws is presented in the appendix of this report. This list will also be distributed for insertion in all school bus log books for on-going reference by school bus drivers who travel to centres removed from their communities.

3. School Bus Aerodynamics

The Committee heard several complaints about the problem of mud and snow build-up on the rear of the bus. The staff of the Safety Services Branch of the Department of Highways and Transportation have been in contact with the University of Saskatchewan Transportation Centre regarding a study of school bus aerodynamics. The Honourable Jim Garner has stated his intention to discuss the matter with the Honourable Lloyd Axworthy, Federal Minister of Transport regarding the possibility of federal/provincial cost sharing for such a study. The tentative terms of reference for this study would include the feasibility of improvement in fuel efficiency and reduced build-up of material on the rear of the bus.

4. Impaired Driving

Earlier this year, a school bus driver was convicted of having a blood alcohol level over 80 milligrams per 100 millilitres while operating a school bus. This prompted the Highway Traffic Board to adopt a policy whereby drivers convicted of alcohol related driving offences while operating a school bus will have their licence status reviewed. The Board will be considering whether such persons should be refused issue of school bus operating privileges for an indefinate period of time. Such a refusal would be beyond the normal statutory licence suspension period.

5. Communications

In an effort to effectively promote school bus safety for drivers and passengers, the Committee has approved two informtion kits. The first is designed for School Bus Drivers and will be issued upon the release of this report. The second is for passengers in the age group from kindergarten to grade three. The kindergarten to grade three kits will be issued, in conjunction with School Safety Week, September 24 - 29, to all children travelling by bus next fall. The contents of these kits are outlined in Appendix B.

Summary of Recommendations Completed or In Progress:

Completed

1. Two hundred new 'Stop When Lights Flashing' signs have been erected on higher volume roadways to ensure maximum exposure to motorists. 162 locations for 'School Bus Ahead' signs have been identified.

2. A special school bus driver handbook has been prepared.

3. A pamphlet has been produced outlining the procedures which school bus drivers should follow when a motorist passes the bus while loading or unloading.

4. A separate 'S' endorsement card for the school bus driver licences has been implemented.

In Progress

The Committee recommends that:

5.(a) The use of STOP ARMS be mandatory on all school buses registered for the first time after August 31, 1984.

5.(b) School boards and contractors consider retro-fitting stop arms on buses with significant operational life left.

6. No driver be given a passing mark if the question related to the need for stopping for schools buses are answered incorrectly after July 1, 1984.

7. A minimum fine of $250 be instituted, for the offence of passing a bus while displaying alternately flashing red lights.

8. Contractors and school boards consider discontinuing the purchase of van conversions in favour of the more crash worthy small school bus.

9. A review be conducted of base to bus, home to bus and bus to bus communication systems.

10. All school buses registered for the first time to be fitted with 'Car Behind' first aid kits.

11. In an effort to promote school bus safety for drivers and passengers, two information kits for drivers (completed) and for school children (in progress) will be issued.

12. It is the consensus of the Committee that in order to properly assess all alternatives, their role shall continue to be on-going, offering a focus for public discussion on the vital issue of pupil transportation safety.

Appendix A

Re: School Bus Safety Lights

To date the following municipalities have passed bylaws prohibiting the use of school bus safety lights within their municipal boundaries.

Estevan	Assiniboia
Melville	Carrot River
Moose Jaw	Glaslyn
North Battleford	Kamsack
Prince Albert	Maple Creek
Regina	Mossbank
Saskatoon	Pierceland
Weyburn	Spiritwood

The following municipalities prohibit the use of school bus safety lights at certain locations:

Avonlea -
- on First Avenue from New Warren Place to Armstrong Drive.

Biggar - Nova School
- on 6th Avenue from Main Street to King Street
on King Street from 5th Avenue to 6th Avenue.

Biggar - Woodrow Lloyd School
- on King Street from 6th Avenue to 7th Avenue.
- on 6th Avenue from King Street to Dominion Street.

Biggar - Biggar Composite School
- on 6th Avenue from King Street to Dominion Street.
- on Dominion Street from 6th Avenue to 7th Avenue.

Biggar - St. Gabriel's R.C. Separate School
- on King Street from 7th Avenue to 8th Avenue.
- on 8th Avenue from King Street to Main Street.

Dalmeny
- on all streets except where the speed limited is 50 km or more.

Delisle
- on all streets except provincial highway #'s 45 and 7.

Foam Lake
- on Albert Avenue in front of Composite School
- Saskatchewan Avenue in front of Elementary School.

Gravelbourg

- on the south side of First Avenue West between Bettez Street and Athabasca Street.
- on Athabasca Street from First Avenue to the southern limits of Arthabasca Street.

Shaunavon

- on all streets except provincial highway #'s 13 and 37 and 10th Avenue.

Yorkton

- at all designated school areas.

Appendix B

School Bus Driver's Kit

-Bus Driver Pamphlet, 'Charging Violators'.
-School Bus Sign lapel pin.
-Vehicle Checklist Sticker.
-Final Report of 1983 Hearings.
-Saskatchewan Safety Council Driver Improvement pamphlet.
-Bumper sticker, 'I Stop For School Buses'.
-Letter from Chairman.

Kindergarten to Grade Three Kit

-Bumper sticker, 'I Stop For School Buses'.
-School Bus Sign Sticker.
-Bus Driver Pamphlet, 'Charging Violators'.
-School Bus Safety colouring pamphlet.
-Letter from Chairman.

Appendix C

Status of Discussions From Interim Report:

(Listed on page 11 of the Interim Report)

1. Status Quo:
Committee actions to date rule out leaving things as they are.

2. Van Conversions:
Refer to recommendation four of this report.

3. Inspection of Taxis and Private Vehicles Transporting students:
Committee will continue to monitor.

4. Retro-fit Buses and Vans with High-backed Seats Etc.
Addressed previously.

5. Additional Interior Padding:
Further study.

6. Shatter Proof Side Windows:
Addressed previously.

7. Escape Hatch on Roof
A new technology. Will monitor developments.

8. Heating and Ventilation:
Adhere to Federal standards.

10. Pop-out Windshields:
Further study required.

11. "Car Behind" Kits:
Refer to Committee recommendation Six.

12. Thermo Pane Windows:
Further study required.

13. Improved Mirror Locations:
Further study required.

14. Electric Windshield Wipers:
All new buses are equipped with such.

15. Sun Visors:
Further study required.

16. Convex Mirror Inside Bus at Rear:
Further study required.

17. Clean Rear Windows"
Addressed in Activities & Developments.

18. Eight Light System On All Buses:
Further study.

19. Advance Stop Lights:
Further study required.

20. Stop Arms:
Refer to recommendation One of this report.

21. Research Into Keeping Outside Rear of Bus Clean:
Addressed in Activities and Developments.

22. Reflective Material on Outside Rear of Buses:
Further study required.

23. Installaton of CB Radios:
Refer to recommendation One.

24. Provincial Communications System for Buses:
Refer to recommendation Five.

25. Driver Qualifications:
S-Endorsement now in place.

26. Location of Loading and Unloading School Buses When on Highway.
Now established in regulations.

27. Stopping at Railway Crossings Controlled by Signals:
Agreed - the Committee agreed to not recommend that buses stop at controlled railway crossings.

28. Yearly Medical Examinations for Drivers:
Further consultation on this matter.